

Ecuador Report

24th July - 12th August 2016

On the 24th July I arrived in Guayaquil, Ecuador, there was no FUVIDA camp this year due to the Earthquake which occurred on the 16th April 2016 I took with me a large suitcase full of diabetes supplies. FUVIDA's resources were almost depleted, as they had used their own supplies to help the earthquake victims. I also brought with me from Australia a portable HbA1c machine, and 150 test kits which were donated to IFL by the company **Alere**, who are based in Sydney, Australia. We started at the FUVIDA clinic by testing the HbA1c readings of diabetic patients, this was led by Dr Elizabeth Trimble from Belfast, Ireland.

Wednesday the 27th Dr Liz Trimble gave a lecture at the Catholic University of Guayaquil to approximately 100 medical students, her subject was on Retinopathy. After the lecture I agreed to give an interview to the local radio and television media on the work Insulin for Life Australia was doing in Ecuador

A group of us travelled by van on the 29th July from Guayaquil to Manta which is on the west coast of Ecuador, a 5-hour journey. The next day it was onto Portoviejo the epi-centre where 600 had lost their lives. Many areas of the city were cordoned off; buildings were still too unsafe to enter. The streets in the city had been cleared of debris and rubble. Many residents were living with family, friends, others in makeshift shelters in open parks.

On Saturday we visited Santa Ana a small town in the area of Manabi, not far from Portoviejo. A day camp was held at a resort which had swimming pools, playgrounds and an amusement park. Local Doctors, nurses and volunteers organized activities for the children whilst a testing centre was set up to measure the HbA1c readings. On the day 28 children were tested, advice and counselling were given.

Over 5 days 104 children were tested. The testing program was a success. A 13-year-old boy, and 20-year-old youth both had readings so high that the Alere machine could not register a reading. This proved to be a life saving measure for both of these young males as immediate attention was administered to them which possibly saved their lives. The mother of the 20 year old knew her son was in danger, he stopped taking his insulin and refused to accept the fact that he had diabetes, but his meeting with Dr Trimble, advice from Aracely Basurto, head of FUVIDA and seeing other children younger than himself confidently caring for themselves and knowing that a great number of people actually cared about him and took a personal interest in him and his diabetes, he promised to be more vigilant about his care and to apply the principals taught by the volunteer nurses and doctors

There is an ongoing challenge, and that is to supply insulin to sustain those diabetics. Many have lost the homes, their lively hood, have very little income if any at all, are stressed and depressed. The importance of having people that care is an emotional uplift to many of these people, to know that locals and foreigners who are willing to spend their own money and time to bring support is an appreciation that gives hope.

A record, listing all the patients tested, and their results is available to those with authority to view them.

We returned to Guayaquil, and on Monday 1st August Dr Liz Trimble left to return to Ireland, having given her time an effort free to help save others.

I then travelled to the city of Cuenca in the Andes mountains, 9000 feet above sea level to visit Dr Ana Fernanda Sanchez head of the Los Fresnos Casa de Diabetes association a program which has been supported by IFL for 10 years. Whilst there we spoke with the local health authorities about the problems of receiving and distribution of diabetes aid. I also met many of the diabetes patients and listened to some of their stories, they invited me to their diabetes camp next year. Ana Fernanda donated 2,000 mls of her associations insulin to the earthquake victims, aid previously sent to her by IFL. She made the 9-hour journey from Cuenca to Portoviejo 4 times, at her own expense, over 4 months to help distribute it. Other non-government groups also assisted earthquake victims. Members of FDJE from Quito donated their time and supplies. The IDF (International Diabetes Federation) sent aid through IFL Australia. IFL USA & Ecuadorian expats living in the USA also responded with diabetes aid.

After 2 days' I returned to Guayaquil.

Meeting with the Health Ministry

In Guayaquil on the 5th August 2016. Aracely and I met with Dr Cesar Moncayo from ARSCA (Health Ministry) at the Institute of Hygiene, he advised us the rules for donated medicines entering Ecuador have changed, because of the earthquake. I expressed my concerns in the long delays and absorbent customs costs it took for the aid to be processed and released.

This is what is now required, according to Dr Moncayo of ARSCA, for IFL to send free donated lifesaving medicine to poor Ecuadorian diabetes sufferers

1. A list of the donated aid
2. The name of the manufacturer of the aid.
3. The manufacture date and expiry date of the aid
4. The aid expiry date of the medicine is to be no less the 12 months
5. A copy of the listed items for the Health Department
6. A letter of Notary from IFL, to be signed by a Notarised Lawyer in Australia.
7. The stamp of Approval on the Notarised paperwork from the Ecuadorian Embassy in Australia, before the aid can be sent by IFL to Ecuador.
8. A copy of the operating License number of IFL's registration with the Victorian Health department of Australia.
9. A copy of the company operating code or number, of each Insulin Manufacturer who supplies insulin in Australia, for the insulin IFL sends to Ecuador.

Dr Moncayo assured me if the paperwork was correct and the rules followed then the shipment would be released quickly. I also pointed out to him IFL had been sending aid to Ecuador for 13 years, aid worth over \$700,000. He admitted, that bureaucracy in Ecuador is a problem.

IFL is not the only organisation in the world who has come up against such bureaucracy in Ecuador. I met the agent for AmeriCares, Fernando Bendek of the USA in Guayaquil he had been trying for 3 months to get the approval to have water purifying filters donated from the USA to the affected areas. He told me of his frustration dealing with the health department.

The governments of Argentina, and Luxemburg in Europe offered diabetes assistance to the earthquake victims but withdrew it after the bureaucratic process they needed to go through to get it into Ecuador.

Venezuela

There is a humanitarian crisis unfolding in Venezuela. Venezuelans were contacting Aracely at FUVIDA for insulin, some were prepared to travel from Venezuela to buy insulin from her.

Summary

Diabetes is an ongoing problem in Ecuador, whilst there, on average 3 persons a day were contacting Aracely at FUVIDA for diabetes assistance. A lack of a national diabetes education program sponsored by the government will continue to plague Ecuador, and cost the government and the community hundreds of thousands of dollars for treatment.

Bureaucratic process, is a major problem facing many foreign government and NGO's humanitarian aid programs wishing to assist Ecuador. Once due process is followed and the paperwork is sent, it takes between 4-6 weeks for the Health department and Customs to give approval. The aid is then sent from Australia arriving after 4 days, it then takes another 4- 6 weeks to have it released, during which time absorbent handling and storage costs are charged by customs. In some cases, up to \$1,000 US. Which is the equivalent to 3 months' wages in Ecuador. If a shorter turnaround period is not forthcoming, then IFL will consider withdrawing aid from Ecuador.

The number one cause of preventable death in Ecuador, is diabetes.

Thank you, acknowledgements.

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To all the IFL individual sponsors, and major sponsors helping to save lives around the world.

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